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AUTHOR	Collins, Rita
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ABSTRACT

This document contains a trilogy of one-act plays, three multiple-act plays, and guidelines for using drama in adult literacy education classes. The background of the plays' development is outlined in a brief introductory section. Ideas provided for using drama in literacy education are procedures for conducting readings, suggestions for assigning characters, public performances, methods of speaking lines, and suggestions for constructing sets. The first play, "The President's Lesson," touches upon several political topics and ends with a mock press conference. In the play "Seeing Things," adult students are forced to make difficult decisions about how to spend their time. The trilogy of one-act plays, which are respectively titled "Voices," "Twogether," and "Helping Out," represent various experiences in adult literacy. In the full-length play "Half Full," the hopes and frustrations of many adult literacy students are presented directly to the audience members, who are treated as if they must become part of the problems' solutions. Accompanying each play is a brief introduction that includes a plot summary, discussion of the theme, and comments on the play in the context of the other plays presented. Contains 10 references. (MN)

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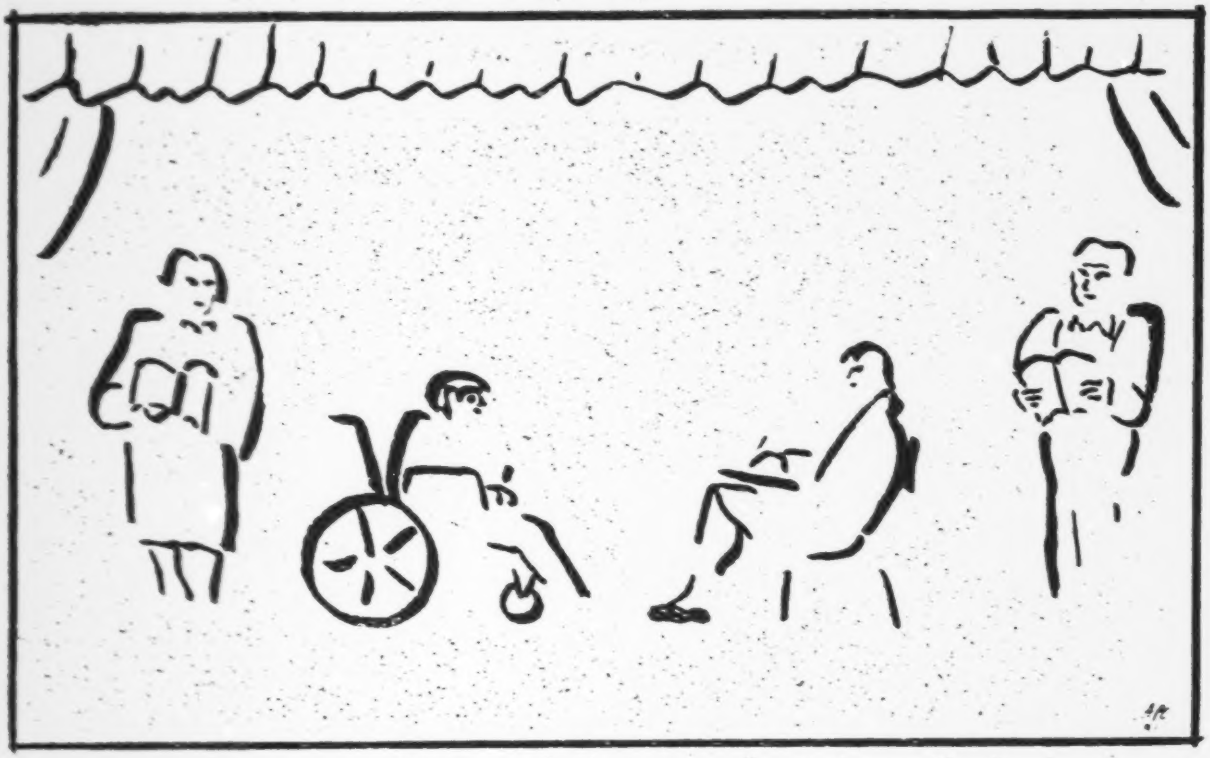
LITERACY DRAMA

Using Plays in Adult Literacy Education



Rita Collins

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LITERACY DRAMA

Using Plays in Adult Literacy Education

Rita Collins

Portland Community College
Portland, Oregon
1992
This project funded by a 353 Project Grant.

Judy Heumann and the ABE Literacy Troupe
deserve top billing for this project.
Judy provided the organizational skills
and emotional support to bring this book to completion.
The ABE Literacy Troupe gave me words and
confidence to write the plays.

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Introduction

How the idea originated with me for using drama to teach literacy, does not matter. What does matter is the response I received when I put the idea before the Adult Basic Education class I teach. Fourteen students raised their hands indicating they were interested in doing a play. Most of them had never read a play before or ever had an opportunity to act in one. Yet these students were excited by the idea of drama. Each term more students have joined our troupe. Our confidence has grown to undertake more difficult plays and to try more experimental techniques. If the students did not responded that first day with such enthusiasm, this project would not have happened.

I don't know if there is any such thing as a typical ABE class. My class seems extraordinary, but I am sure other instructors feel the same about their classes. Each term my team teacher and I have forty students who enter with low-level reading skills. The class also serves adults with physical disabilities working on basic skills. Hearing-impaired students, students with cerebral palsy, others who have been classifed as mentally retarded, and individuals with job-related injuries are among those in our class.

Is there anything these students have in common? Perhaps their perception of themselves as inadequate. Many have failed in school. Most are without a job or skills to earn a living. Yet each of these students decided to return to school as an adult to try again. My job is to make this attempt successful.

Finding materials for beginning adult readers is a difficult task. The materials need to be written at an appropriate reading level and be interesting to adults. I also look for materials that raise questions. I want students to discuss what they read and see it as valuable in itself, not just drill and practice exercises. The materials should speak to the students and their experiences, the problems they face and their dreams.

These plays provide a chance for literacy students to read and experiment with drama. Parts can be read sitting around a table, acted out within a group or performed in front of an audience. The

plays offer students an opportunity to explore issues and emotions that effect their lives, to try on different personae, and to speak out. The plays are designed to raise questions. Students are encouraged to analyze characters' decisions and discuss their options, to examine cultural beliefs and values. These are plays designed for adults familiar with the problems of illiteracy. There are no easy fill-in-the-blank answers.

This book contains five plays each with a brief overview of ideas and suggestions. It also has a chapter on production and a bibliography for additional readings. All the plays in this book have been tried by the ABE Literacy Troupe I work with. All were adapted to meet the particular needs of the students and environmental limitations at the time of our production. These plays have worked for us as a vehicle for expanding literacy skills, enhancing self-esteem, and building a community among a diverse group of adult students.

The plays have worked as a process for students to explore language and ideas. At the beginning, I would sometimes forget why the students and I were doing drama. I would begin to worry about forgotten lines or missed cues. I would forget that we were working as a group to understand literacy and culture, to explore the potential in each of us and of our group. But the patience of the students prevailed and I would once again begin enjoying what we were doing.

I hope that those of you who use these plays can learn from this and skip past the mistakes I made. Encourage your students to try anything they believe might work. Enjoy the process of adult literacy drama! The ABE Literacy Troupe of Portland Community College has now given numerous performances. I look back at that first day when I asked if any students were interested in drama. We've come a long way and it's been great.

Ideas for Using Drama in Literacy Education

Readings

Any of these plays can be read without being performed for an audience. If the students will be reading the plays aloud in class, parts can be divided up among different readers. Reading through the first time for new vocabulary is a good idea. A second reading can be an opportunity to focus and discuss the ideas and characters. The manner in which a part is read can affect the type of person a character becomes. Switching parts and re-reading can be an interesting way to explore character portrayals.

There are various ways an instructor or tutor can develop written exercises from a play. Students could write an alternative ending or change the parts of a character. How would *Seeing Things* end if Karman decided to continue her tutoring with Marge? What would Cleo do if there was a second act to *Voices* ?

The plays can also be used to explore language. There is a rich vocabulary in theater. Action words, adjectives, imperatives, and emotions abound! Students can write a descriptive paragraph on one of the characters or analyze an issue in the play. How could a line be changed to make the remarks stronger, weaker, or more tender? How would the lines be different if the person was more educated, from another country, or a different gender?

Students can experiment reading aloud to each other or to a tutor. Making a audio cassette or a videotape of a dramatic reading would provide other formats for experimentation and analysis. A tape recorder could be used for "radio drama". Students can decide how to adapt a play for an audio performance.

Drama can be used in many ways within a classroom setting or with a literacy student working one-on-one with a tutor. As dialogue, drama is easily incorporated by these adult students. It is a medium that can be quickly grasped and molded to meet individual needs.

The amount of time used for drama will vary depending on the instructional schedule and how drama is used. As a reading activity it can be substituted for books or other reading materials. Drama can also be scheduled as a separate activity. As a morning class five days a week, the drama group in my ABE class meets once a week for an hour. When we are rehearsing a play, the troupe may meet more often as our performance approaches.

Characters

There are no rules in deciding who takes which part except to remain open-minded. Whether the play is done sitting around a table or on stage, I encourage students to decide for themselves which part they want. I usually begin by briefly describing the plot and characters. Often the sound of a particular character's name or an occupation will stir a student to request that part. Gender, ability, or physical appearance should not be criteria for disqualifying anyone from doing a part.

Students can be encouraged to try a different persona. *The President's Lesson* was written to give students an opportunity to be someone "at the top". In other plays they can try on the role of teacher or tutor, an obnoxious person, or someone brave. Once a person has taken a part, the character's personality should be explored. What would this person wear? How might they move? Would their voice be gentle or demanding? Even if the play is used as a reading exercise, students can attempt to be in character and to modulate their voices.

Going Public

The step does not have to be a big one between using a play as a reading exercise and giving a public performance. Our premiere performance was done in the front of a classroom. Props were chairs and desks. A rolling blackboard was used as a curtain between scenes. The audience was a small group of students and friends.

Perhaps your students will decide to form a theatrical troupe and do a larger production. A stage can often be found through a school, church or community center. Advertising can be done with posters designed by students and put up in libraries, on bulletin boards or in neighborhood apartment buildings. Families and friends of the students are always in attendance at the plays. I remember our first large production when a young man brought flowers and a note for one of the actresses back stage. We all experienced a bit of the theater that is described in novels. Perhaps our troupe wasn't famous, but we were recognized. These were not just adult literacy students. They were actors and actresses about to give a performance.

The Lines

Just as there are not set rules for choosing parts, there are not set rules for speaking lines. Some students will read their part carefully many times and make the words their own. The exact wording may be different from the text, but the ideas remain the same. They have put the character's thoughts into their own language. Other students will diligently memorize their part. There have been others who have chosen to read their lines on stage. One man pointed out that as a student in a literacy program, he wanted the audience to see that he had learned to read.

Whichever method is used by a student, it should be one that is comfortable. One technique we have used to help students with their lines, is having cue cards inside a newspaper or among papers on a desk on stage where the actor or actress sits. This is a good back-up system in case lines are forgotten or to give a bit of psychological support. We also use prompters who stand off stage to help with lines and cues.

During rehearsals, students should think of how the dialogue moves. What is an appropriate response to a particular question? How will the mother react when the son complains about the other passengers? Some scenes have been changed during a rehearsal to move more smoothly in response to the individuals who are acting the parts and their interpretation of the scene. No play is written in

stone. Especially in using drama for literacy education, experimentation and creativity are encouraged.

Some of the plays in this collection have characters who use sign language. These parts have been marked by (S). Often students who took those roles, changed their lines into ASL (American Sign Language). If no one in your troupe signs, these parts can be adapted. Some suggestions for adaptations are included in the various overviews.

The Set

Our productions have always been done on a small budget. We have not the resources to construct fancy sets. These limitations have helped the troupe develop alternative means of set design. A favorite is using an overhead projector. Scene changes are fast and details can be as simple or complex as the artist wishes. We have also used large blackboards on rollers. Information can be written on the blackboard for the audience or pictures drawn for a backdrop.

Props are easily collected among the troupe members. Usually there is a prop committee in charge of these details. Adult students are fairly ingenious. What we are not able to collect, we make from paper or cardboard. Literacy drama does not need to be an expensive undertaking.

Conclusion

Drama can be used in literacy education to enhance reading skills, encourage language development, and provide an activity for adults that strengthen their self-confidence. Many undereducated adults feel they lack the knowledge or skills to speak in public. Their opinions and needs are not expressed. They are part of a silent population who are unwilling to demand change or seek reforms. By giving these adults an opportunity to speak out loud on issues that effect their lives, they can develop skills and language they feel are lacking. Within an environment that is supportive and flexible, these students can experiment with ideas and roles.

I see students gain confidence through drama that spreads to other aspects of their lives. Shy students who rarely speak in class

join the troupe and become more expressive. Students who had trouble with attendance begin coming regularly in order not to miss rehearsals. Drama is not the solution to all the educational problems confronting the instructor, but it is another tool. It is a tool which allows students to connect the written and spoken word.

The plays also give people in the community a broader perspective of adult literacy. The issues are more complicated than many people think. Literacy is not just knowing how to read. Our performances were valuable to the members of the troupe, but there was also an impact on the audience. Families saw a student be transformed into a star. College staff gained new appreciation for the "dumb" ABE students. Children came to see a parent on stage acting. Presenting plays to the community gave the students an opportunity to share their experiences and expertise. It was an educational experience for the audience as well as the cast.

The President's Lesson

A Literacy Play
in
Three Acts

Written by Rita Collins

The President's Lesson

This was the first play ever produced by the Portland Community College Southeast Center ABE class. We started as a group of inexperienced thespians with a goal; to have a play ready to show to other students in under six weeks.

Many ideas for this play came from the students. They wanted a play that addressed literacy, the drug problem, lack of funds and more. I wrote it to include these topics and to give the students a chance to act like people in charge. They would play the President of the United States, the Seceretary of Defense, and successful business people. Our props were simple. The play was performed in the front of a classroom. It met with an enthusiastic response from the audience and a solid vote by the troupe to produce a second play.

The President's Lesson touches on many political topics. This provided an opportunity for discussions among students and staff about federal spending and government priorities. Not everyone in the cast agreed with the ideas presented in the play, but acknowledged that drama was another medium for expressing opinions and exchanging ideas.

The play ended with a "press conference". The troupe sat facing the audience and we opened the floor for questions. The audience asked a variety of questions concerning the play as well as about the lives of the actors and actresses. By their responses, it was evident that these students felt stronger speaking out. They answered questions clearly and gave wonderful examples of their own experiences. Perhaps it was the manner in which the troupe answered those unrehearsed questions which helped me decide to continue with literacy drama.

The President's Lesson

CHARACTERS:

Business Person from New York, Sally Griffins
Secretary
Accountant
Lawyer
President George Bush
Barbara Bush
Security Guard
Presidential Aide, Elaine Booth
Business Person from California, Betty Johnson
Secretary of Education
Secretary of Defense
Teacher
General

ACT ONE

Opening Scene:
Sally Griffins is a successful business person in New York. Although her reading skills are poor, she is good at her job. She is also smart at hiding the fact she cannot read from other people. Sally feels too busy and ashamed to go back to school. She is sitting at her desk thinking about this when her secretary enters.

SECRETARY: Excuse me, Ms. Griffins. I don't understand this letter. Could you please read it over and explain it to me?

SALLY: I'm too busy right now to read it. If you leave the letter here, I will explain it to you later when I have more time.

SEC: It really wouldn't take long to read and then I could get it sent off today.

SALLY: I know you like to get your work done, but I can't do it now. Just leave it and I'll get to it later.

(Secretary leaves. The Accountant enters with a stack of papers.)

ACCOUNTANT: Sally! I'm so glad you're here. I'm almost finished with the tax papers. I just need to get some information from you. Can you just look over this one section? It will be great to get this job finished and sent off.

SALLY: Getting these tax papers done was a lot of work. Sorry, but I can't look at the papers right now. I forgot my glasses today. I'll take them home and finish it up tonight for you. You'll have them first thing tomorrow morning, I promise!

ACCOUNTANT: Oh no, Sally! You're always forgetting your glasses. You should tie them around your neck. I really wanted to finish this today. Maybe I could read it to you and then you can fill in the information?

SALLY: I think it's better if I take it home. Tomorrow won't be too late to get it off. You've done a great job getting the forms finished early. Thanks.

(Accountant leaves. Lawyer enters)

LAWYER: Hi, Sally. You must be getting excited about your trip to Washington. Imagine meeting the President of the United States! Wish I was going with you. Anyhow I read over the contract you will be taking. It looks good and will help get more money and support for drug treatment programs here in New York. The President may make some changes so be sure to read the papers over again before you sign them. We don't want those people from California getting a better deal.

SALLY: Thanks for looking over the contract. I won't sign anything without looking it over. I learned that lesson before. I am excited about going to the White House, but I'm nervous too. Meeting new people always makes me nervous. I don't know what to expect.

LAWYER: I'm sure it will be fine. Don't worry. And I'll see you next week when you get back. Bye.

SALLY: Bye! (Lawyer leaves). I sure hope the President doesn't ask me to read anything. This is getting to be a bigger and bigger

problem. I just don't know what to do. I can't expect my sister to read stuff to me forever!!
(Sally picks up the papers feeling discouraged and walks out.)

(Side scene. Lawyer, secretary and accountant stand together drinking coffee and talking.)

SECRETARY: I really wanted to finish that letter and get it mailed out. Sometimes Ms. Griffin tries my patience.

ACCOUNTANT: Yeah. I know what you mean. She's always forgetting her glasses. Why doesn't she keep an extra pair in the office?

SECRETARY: It's almost like she doesn't want to take the time to read anything. She's always taking work home.

LAWYER: Or giving it to me! I sometimes wonder if she can read?

SECRETARY: I sometimes wonder if she can read.....

ACT TWO

Opening Scene:
President Bush is sitting with his Aide in the Oval Office. A Security Guard stands off to the side. Barbara Bush is sitting on a sofa reading. Two business people enter the office: Sally Griffins from New York and Betty Johnson from California.

BETTY: Good morning, Mr. President. I'm Betty Johnson and this is my friend from New York, Sally Griffins. We're glad you could meet with us this morning. These new contracts will certainly help our states work on the drug problem.

BUSH: Good morning. It's nice to meet both of you. I'm glad we're able to work together. My aide, Elaine Booth, and I have discussed your proposed contracts. We've made a few changes but I'm sure you'll find them acceptable. Maybe you can take a minute now to look it over and we can get these papers signed and sealed.

BETTY: (Reads over the papers quickly.) Looks fine to me. I'm glad that California will be so involved with this new program. Drugs are a serious problem out there especially for young people.

BUSH: I know. That's why I'm glad businesses from California and New York are working together towards a solution. Are the papers OK with you, Ms. Griffins?

SALLY: They seem fine, but I really want my lawyer to look them over before I sign anything.

BETTY: Come on, Sally. There aren't that many changes. We've been working on this for months. I'm sure your lawyer would agree.

BUSH: Maybe if you can point out any parts you are uncomfortable with, we can discuss them. I did hope to get these papers signed today.

AIDE: In fact, we have a press conference set up this afternoon. It would be in everyone's best interest if you could sign them now.

SALLY: I'm sorry but I really want my lawyer to see the contract first.

BUSH: I hate to put this off any longer. Elaine, call Ms. Griffins' lawyer up. Maybe she can fly here this morning.

SALLY: I don't know if you can reach her. She's very busy.

AIDE: Too busy to answer the President??

BETTY: Sally, why are you making this so difficult? What is it about the contract you don't like?

SALLY: It's hard to say, Betty. I just want my lawyer to read it over before I sign it.

BARBARA (comes over): Ms. Griffins, I know how difficult it can be to read through these government papers. Can I read them to you? Maybe that would make you feel more comfortable about signing them.

BUSH: Barbara! Thanks for offering to help, but we're trying to

finish up this business. We don't need you reading the whole thing out loud to us. We're not children!

BARBARA: Of course you're not, George. But sometimes it helps people to hear what's written down. These papers can be so difficult to read.

AIDE: If people can't read it themselves, they shouldn't be in business!

GUARD: Excuse me. But I wonder if I could ask Ms. Griffins a straight forward question? Are you able to read these papers?

SALLY: (looks very embarrassed) No.

BUSH: No!?! What's the matter with you. Did you forget your glasses?

BETTY: Are you sick or something?

AIDE: Are you stupid?

GUARD: Good guesses but you're probably all wrong. I suspect Ms. Griffins just never learned to read.

SALLY: (Looks amazed at the Guard's perception.) He's right.

GUARD: I suspected as much. The same thing happened to me. In fact, it's happened to a lot of people. For all kinds of reasons, some people don't learn to read when they are kids. Then as adults they have to work hard to get by or hide it. When I was a kid I used to stutter real bad. The teacher just didn't want to take the time to work with me or even listen. I didn't learn much at all in school even though I wanted to. Finally dropped out to get a job. I worked hard, did fairly well for myself, but never felt satisfied. Then one day I decided I had had enough. Found out about a class for adults who wanted to improve their reading. I worked hard at that too. I made it through and now here I am; a guard at the White House. You know, Ms. Griffins, you shouldn't feel ashamed about not knowing how to read the papers. I bet there are reasons as to why you didn't learn to read as a child. But now it's up to you to do something about it.

AIDE: I can't believe a person could go through school in this country of ours and not learn how to read. Schools are open for all children from first through twelveth grade. Anybody should be able to learn to read in that amount of time. If they can't, that person must be lazy or just plain dumb!

GUARD: Nope. There are lots of reasons. My cousin, Harry, never learned to read well. He's smart and not the least bit lazy. The school he went to was crowded. Too many students and not enough teachers. He managed to make it through seven grades before he got bored and left. And one of the cooks here, she went through school and got a diploma and you should see her struggle to read and write. Her skills are lousy! There are many reasons why folks don't learn to read and write as children.

BARBARA: He's right. Sometimes it's the schools or the teachers. Sometimes it's the parents. You shouldn't blame the children. We're the adults. We need to figure out why this is happening to our children. You know how many adults in this country can't read well enough to fill out an application? Over 30 million! (Turns to Aide) You're right. There is something wrong in this country if so many adults grow up not knowing how to read. But it's not the children's fault.

BETTY: I didn't know there were so many illiterate people. Where are they? How come I never see them?

GUARD: Well, you're looking at two in this room. I suspect there are many people you know that hide it from you.

BETTY: But why hide it? They should ask for help.

SALLY: It's not that easy to ask for help. People laugh at you or think you are stupid. Some wonder if there's something wrong with you. Reading is hard. I've tried to teach myself, but it just hasn't worked. And where can I go to school? I'm not a kid anymore. I'm a busy person with a business to take care of.

BARBARA: Ms. Griffins, there are many different programs that you could go to. Many community colleges have programs for adults who want to improve their skills. You can also get a volunteer tutor to meet you if you don't want to study around other people. I can give

you a number to call or you can get one from your local library. You need to make the time, but there are programs available to you.

AIDE: I still don't understand how a person can grow up and not learn how to read. Why didn't your parents do something about it?

SALLY: My parents didn't read all that well either. They didn't know what to do and felt too ashamed to complain to my teachers. Then later when I went into business and started making money, it didn't seem to matter. I thought I could hide it. My sister reads. She helps me with my papers at night.

BUSH: Well, I guess we're all learning something here today and it's not about drug treatment programs. I guess you were right, Barbara. We need to take time to understand this illiteracy problem better. What else can we do?

BARBARA: Money, George. It takes money to teach people to read.

GEORGE: OK. (Reaches into his pocket and pulls out a bill.) Here's $100.

BARBARA: $100! Get serious. It takes more than that to set programs up and get teachers trained if we're going to solve this problem.

BETTY: Maybe businesses could do something.

GUARD: Maybe <u>you</u> can do something.

BETTY: Hmmm. OK. I'll call the literacy coordinator in California to see what I can do to help.

BUSH: I'll talk with the Secretary of Education.

SALLY: I'll find myself a tutor.

ACT THREE

Opening Scene:
One year later in the Oval Office. The President, the Aide, the

Security Guard, the Secretary of Education, the Secretary of Defense, a Teacher, and a General are discussing the budget.

BUSH: Alright, Ms. Secretary. We're giving the Department of Education an increase in funds this year. We realize how important education is to the welfare of our country. (Pushes over a huge stack of dollar bills.)
For the Department of Defense, we've had to make some cuts. These are tough times. Nobody wants new taxes. But I'm sure the Defense Department will figure out how to do a fine job on a limited budget. There are a lot of good people out there who would be happy to volunteer. (Pushes a small stack of bills to him.)

SEC. DEFENSE: Volunteers?! How can we run a decent defense system with volunteers and no money? We need professionals - people who are well trained for the job and who work a regular schedule. We need equipment!

BUSH: Volunteers are an important part of our country's workforce. If Barbara was here, she'd tell you. You're smart. I'm sure you'll figure out a way to build a strong Defense Department without a lot of money. Ask business to help. Or maybe you can get the soldiers to buy their own equipment.

GENERAL: Buy their own equipment? How do you expect us to have a strong military if generals have to buy their own equipment?

AIDE: We know you'll figure something out. After all, that's what you get paid for.

SEC. EDUCATION: We appreciate your support, Mr. President. This increase will allow the Education Department to set up new programs and do important research.

TEACHER: This is fantastic! We'll hire more teachers, buy computers for everyone, get enough books so each student can have their own.....

SECURITY GUARD: Hold it! Hold it! You're not getting this money so you can just buy more. Having more isn't the only answer. Figure out how you can make your programs better. What can you do to change the system that allows people to go through school and never learn to read? I think you should put some thought into this before you go off spending money.

SEC. DEFENSE: Yes, he's right. We used to spend money like it would last forever. Never figured out any better solutions. Now we don't have money or the answers. The Guard's right. Give some thought to what you are going to do before you do it.

SEC. EDUCATION: That's a tough one. We know there are many reasons why adults don't learn to read in school, but figuring out what to do about it is another story. I'm not sure where to start.

TEACHER: I suggest we go to the experts. We can contact people at universities and think tanks to see what they think we should do.

GUARD: There are other experts you should ask too. What about the adults who can't read? Maybe you should ask them. They've had the experience, they've tried different programs. Why don't you ask them what they think the answers to the questions might be?

GENERAL: Wouldn't that be like asking the enemy how to win the war?

BUSH: I don't think finding a way for people to get an education is exactly like a war, General. Although that might be a great idea for a new campaign: 'The War on Illiteracy'.

GUARD: We don't need another war! We need solutions that address the problems. We need to look at what we value. We need to change things in this country so children don't grow up feeling like losers without any way to succeed. We need to ask these adults who can't read why they never learned, and how we can best help them to learn to read and write now.

Aide: I'll set up a press conference with these people immediately.

All of the characters come forward and seat themselves behind the table facing the audience. A "reporter" in the audience starts the press conference by asking them a question about adult literacy. The audience is encouraged to direct additional questions to the cast.

SEEING THINGS

(A play that looks at choices)

Written by Rita Collins
a literacy drama production

Seeing Things

Seeing Things addresses many issues common in adult education. Students are forced to make choices about how to spend their time. School is not a part of their regular schedule as it is for children. Instead, these adults returning to school must decide that learning is an important element which needs time. Time given to learning means time taken away from family, work or other activities. This decision is often a difficult one and one that occurs for many literacy students again and again.

The play also addresses people's desire to stay with the familiar. *Seeing Things* was originally written to follow the lives of Karman, a literacy student, and Tracy, a deaf woman who is choosing between going to a deaf college or to a college with hearing students. The premiere production was done using a number of hearing-impaired actresses and actors. Other productions could be done by making a few alterations in the script. The choice for Tracy could be between a Black univeristy and one where she would be in the minority as an African-American. Other ideas would be to have Tracy portrayed as a woman with a disability or from an ethnic minority.

It is important to remember in any production to be flexible with casting. Students should have the option of deciding what type of role they will have. Drama is a wonderful way for people to explore different personalities and traits. Do not set limits on who gets a role. Although at times I felt overwhelmed with the challenges of production, the final product was always terrific. I think this was a result of the enthusiasm students developed when given the opportunity to reach beyond their daily reality.

Most of our plays have been performed in spaces that lacked the finer details of a theater. And most have been done without a budget! Props are collected among students and staff. The backdrops are done on butcher paper or with overheads. In *Seeing Things*, Act II, the scene shifts between Karman's home and BP's home. We set up overhead projectors on the two outer corners of the stage. Our

"lighting technicians" turned on one overhead that showed the interior of Karman's house, than turned that off as the other was turned on to show the interior of BP's. Using overheads was an inexpensive way to provide detailed backgrounds. The idea has been used in other plays, but worked extremely well in this one.

SEEING THINGS

CHARACTERS:

Karman
Tracy *
Conductor
Friend One *
Friend Two *
BP
Mother
Zelda
Husband
Waitron
Marge, the tutor
Jane
Assorted passengers and customers

*(S) part is signed

Act I

Opening Scene - On the train from Chicago to Portland. The train is at the station in Spokane. Only a few passengers are in the train car as the scene opens: a literacy student, Karman, reading a book and Tracy, a deaf passenger who is looking out the window. A conductor comes through the car.

CONDUCTOR: Spokane! Next stop is .....(The conductor mumbles the rest of the information so none of it is clear.)

KARMAN: Excuse me. Can you please tell me how many more stops we have until we reach Portland?

CONDUCTOR: I'm not here to give out information. I'm here to collect tickets. Here's the schedule. Read it yourself!

(Karman looks confused, cannot understand the schedule and tries to get the attention of the deaf passenger who does not notice. Karman gets out a school book and begins reading. Other people start boarding the train.)

B.P.: (Walks up behind deaf passenger) Excuse me. Is anyone sitting in this seat? Excuse me. Do you mind if I sit here?

(Tracy is not aware that B.P. is there.)

B.P.: Humpf! Some pretty rude people traveling on trains these days. (Turns to Karman) Is anyone sitting here?

KARMAN: No. That seat's empty.

B.P. Thanks. I don't know what's the matter with some of these people. The world has certainly gotten rude.

KARMAN: I think that person is deaf. I don't think she heard you ask about the seat.

B.P.: Deaf? What's a deaf person doing traveling alone anyway? They should have to travel with somebody that can take care of them. So what are you - a college student? What do you study?

KARMAN: I'm just reading a book. I meet with my tutor tomorrow and I'm suppose to have this book done. It takes me a while to go through it. I wonder how much more time we have before the train gets to Portland.

B.P.: That looks like a kid's book. Why are you reading that? Seems like you could be done with it in about thirty seconds.

KARMAN: I have a hard time reading. Actually that's what I'm studying. I have a tutor who helps me with my reading. Do you know what time we get into Portland?

B.P.: You mean to tell me at your age you're just learning to read kids' books? Woooo! What is this world coming to? (B.P. looks disgusted and picks up a newspaper, turning away from Karman who goes back to her book.)

(Enter three friends of Tracy)

TRACY:(S) Hi! Great to see you two. Are you going to Portland?

ONE:(S) Yeah. What are you doing here? Where have you been?

TRACY:(S) I interviewed at a college in Chicago. I'm trying to decide if I want to go to school there. It's a big place. Lots of hearing students.

TWO:(S) What are your other choices? Have you found other colleges you'd like to go to?

TRACY:(S) Yes. I applied to Gallaudet, but what I want to study Gallaudet doesn't have.

TWO:(S) Gallaudet's a great school. I think it's a good idea to go to a place that has what you want to learn.

TRACY:(S) Yeah, but I'm just not sure I'd feel comfortable at the college in Chicago.

ONE:(S) Did you meet anybody when you were there that you liked?

TRACY:(S) Yeah. I did. I met one new person. (Gets excited and begins telling friends about the new person as the train pulls out.)

ACT II

Opening Scene: The scene is the interior of two houses. One house is the home of BP. His mother and a neighbor, Zelda, are sitting having coffee when he walks in. The other house in where Karman lives. Her husband is waiting for her and looks very irritated.

HUSBAND: So how was your trip? I'm glad you're back. Your boss called yesterday. Said to tell you that another shift is opening up if you're interested. Maybe you should take it. It sure wouldn't hurt having some extra money. Maybe next summer we could take a week off and go on vacation.

KARMAN: It's great to be home. The funneral was awful. I thought my aunt would never stop crying. I guess I better call my boss to let her know I'll be back into work tomorrow. That other shift won't fit with my schedule. I'd never get my studying done. Which reminds me. I need to call Marge to set up a place to meet for tutoring this afternoon.

HUSBAND: Why do you waste your time going to that tutor? You got better things to do. You could be earning more money. Or spending time with me. You don't need any help learning those things. You could just read on your own.

KARMAN: But I wouldn't. I'd end up working more, or watching TV, or going out with you and then I'd be another year older and still not know how to read. Studying is important. It might help me get a better job. Or like myself more. I feel dumb.

HUSBAND: You feel dumb if you let yourself feel dumb. You listen to too many people. Look at me. Never graduated from high school and making a bundle. Believe me. You don't need that school stuff. It's just a racket. You're too smart to buy into that.

(FREEZE. Actors freeze in this house. Action switches to BP's house.)

B.P.: Hey Mom! I'm home. Wow, it's great to be back. That train ride was awful. It's worse than the buses. Nothing but crazies!

MOTHER: Welcome back. How was Spokane? You look tired. Did you get a chance to sleep on the train at all?

B.P.: How could I sleep? Surrounded by weirdos! First off there were deaf people on the train by themselves. I mean that doesn't seem right. How do they know where to get off? It just didn't make sense. And then I sit next to a person who looks normal and it turns out she must be retarded or something because she can't read. I mean this lady was sitting there trying to read a kid's book and making it look hard. What's to become of the world! Aren't there any people-just plain normal people like me-left? Aren't there?

ZELDA: You consider yourself a normal person, BP?

BP: As a matter of fact I do. Don't you?

ZELDA: Can't speak for you, but personally I consider myself pretty special. I'm certainly not plain.

BP: I don't know what you're talking about, Zelda. You can hear. You can see. You can tie your shoelaces. You can read the newspaper.You're normal!

ZELDA: You're saying that people that do things the way you do things are normal?

BP: (Starting to feel confused) Not exactly. Well, maybe. No. There are just somethings everybody should be able to do.

ZELDA: Like what?

BP: (Shouting) Like know how to read a kid's book before you're old enough to vote!

MOTHER: BP, we can both hear you. No need to raise your voice. I think Zelda is just asking what it means to you to be normal. I'm sure it means different things to different people.

BP: You two are crazy! Normal is normal. That's all there is to it. I can hear. I can read. I'm normal. People who can't do these things must have something wrong.

MOTHER: Being different isn't wrong, BP. Zelda and I are different from each other but does that make one of us wrong?

ZELDA: If it does, then it must be you because I'm always right!

(FREEZE. Actors freeze in this house. Action switches to Karman's house.)

KARMAN: OK, OK! You're right! I'll stop going to the tutor. I'll take the extra shift. Maybe if I just work on my own my reading will improve. It's just hard. With Marge I know that someone cares if I learn or not.

HUSBAND: I care, but I know you can do it on your own. You don't need Marge. Go ahead and call her. Let her know you're not wasting anymore of your time with her and those stupid books she gives you.

KARMAN: (Goes to phone and dials) Hello Marge? Yeah, I just got back. I wondered if we could meet this afternoon? ...OK. Sure. I know where that is. OK. See you then. (Hangs up)
This sure isn't what I wanted to come back to. Somehow I thought things would go better. Maybe you should try to see it my way once in a while instead of thinking tnat you have all the answers! (Walks out)

(FREEZE. Actor freezes in this house. Action switches to B.P.'s house.)

BP: I can see what you're saying, but I don't know if it's all that easy. I mean we all aren't the same. I agree with that. But it still doesn't seem right that some people can't do things that a lot of other people can do.

MOTHER: Like reading? But I thought you said that other passenger was reading a book.

BP: Well, she was. In fact she said she was studying for a tutor or something.

ZELDA: There you have it. She wants to be like you. What do you know about that? Maybe the whole world is working to be like you, BP. Then everyone would be normal. (Aside to Mother) I hate to imagine that!

BP: You got it wrong. I don't want everyone to be exactly like me. I just think .....OK. Maybe you got a point there. Let's drop it. I'm starved. Can we go out and grab a bite to eat?

MOTHER: I think that's a great idea. You coming, Zelda?

ZELDA: No thanks. I think I'll go home and be abnormal for a while.

ACT III

Opening scene: Inside a restaurant. Tracy and three friends are sitting at one table having a conversation. The tutor, Marge, is sitting at another table with her friend, Jane. Karman arrives and sits with Marge and Jane. A waitron comes over to take their order.

MARGE: Hi Karman! This is my friend, Jane. She is thinking of becoming a tutor. I wanted you two to meet.

JANE: Nice to meet you, Karman. Have you been studying with Marge a long time?

KARMAN: About 6 months.

WAITRON: Did you decide what you want?

KARMAN: Coffee, please.

MARGE: Oh go on. Order something. You must be starved after your trip.

KARMAN: Coffee's fine. I don't feel much like eating today.

MARGE: OK. Well, I'll have coffee and pie.

JANE: I'll have tea and ice cream.

WAITRON: Sure. (walks off)

KARMAN: I've had a job offer from work and I think I'm going to take it. It means that I'll need to stop our meetings, Marge. I'm afraid I won't have enough time to study. But I really appreciate your help. You've done a lot for me. I'll keep reading on my own. Maybe if my work schedule changes this summer, I can call you and we could start up again.

MARGE: Oh. I'm sorry to hear this, Karman. Maybe we could meet every other week? I hate to see you stop now. You've made so much progress. Let's try to work something out. I'm flexible and I know how you feel about your reading. It seems a shame to quit.

KARMAN: There's more to it, Marge. Between work and time with my husband, my day is full. When I meet with you I like to have the stuff read. I don't want to waste your time. Let's just put it on hold until I see what my schedule will be like in the summer. Maybe it will be easier then.

MARGE: All right. If you think that's the best idea. But you know, Karman, you got to make time if you want to do this. There will always be other things that stand in the way if you let them. I know you're busy now, but give some thought to what your priorities are. And maybe you'll keep reading on your own. Did you ever get that library card? I saw there's a new section at the main library with books especially for adults working on reading skills.

JANE: It must be hard to study when you have so many other things in your life. I'm sorry you can't fit in your sessions with Marge.

(Enter BP and Mother. Waitron escorts them to a empty table. BP notices Karman, whispers to his mother and comes over to Karman's table.)

BP: Excuse me. I don't mean to bother you. I sat next to you on the train. You were reading a book. I read my newspaper. I just wanted to say that I've been thinking about it all some more and wanted to encourage you to keep up with your studies. It's great you're learning how to read.

JANE: That's very nice of you, young man. Karman, Marge and I were just talking about her studying. It's hard to make time for these things in a busy life.

BP: Yeah. I know what you mean. I've been thinking about starting karate for about umpteen years now and never get around to it. Who knows? (Turns to Karman) Maybe you're the lady to inspire me to do it. I admire your gumption

KARMAN: Thanks but I think you're talking to the wrong person. I'm quitting my studies. I don't have gumption. I just get pushed around by the best talker. I just want the easy way out.

MARGE: I don't think that's true at all, Karman. You make your own choices. No one forced you to start studying and no one is telling you to stop. It's not easy making changes in your life. Going back to

school is a big change. It makes you look at who you are and what you want to do.

KARMAN: But I don't feel like I'm changing. I'm working the same job. Not studying. Listening to my husband tell me what he wants me to do. This is where I was six months ago. I just don't see how things can ever change.

BP: You're too hard on yourself, lady. Believe me - nobody's perfect. Ask my mother. let me get her. (Goes over to get mother and notices Tracy and friends. Pauses. Looks awkward, smiles and waves.)

TRACY:(S) Do you know this crazy guy?

ONE:(S) I think I saw him on the train.

TWO: Hi. You were on the train, right?.

BP: Yeah. Nice to see you. I was wondering how you manage....Oh. never mind. You know this is kind of weird but that other lady was on the train with us, too. Do you rememeber her? She was sitting across from you studying. Now she's thinking about quitting school. Says it's too hard.

TRACY(S): Why is it hard?

BP: I don't really understand it. You should get her to explain it. I wish someone could convince her to stick with it. Hate to see her give up something like that.

TRACY: (S) (To friends) This guy is crazy. What's the story here? We should try to convince this woman not to quit school? How can it be hard for her? She can hear.

TWO:(S) Hearing isn't everything. (laughs) Maybe she can't read.

ONE:(S) OK, OK. Let's go over. I'm tired of trying to solve your problems, Tracy. We can work on somebody else's for a while.

(Tracy, friends One and Two, Mother and BP all sit down at Karman's table. Waitron brings out order.)

MOTHER: It's very nice to meet you. BP told me how he saw you studying on the train. I admire a person who decides to make changes in her life. (Turns to Marge and Jane) May I ask your names?

MARGE: I'm Marge, Karman's tutor, and this is my friend Jane. Karman and I have been working together for the last six months, until today when she decided to stop for a while.

TRACY:(S) Why are you quitting?

KARMAN: This is so embarassing I don't even know all you people..... I just have other things in my life that I need to do right now.

ONE:(S) Yeah. Priorities. We were just discussing that. Tracy is trying to decide which college to go to, but first has to figure out why she wants to go to college.

BP: You're going to college?! Wow! That's incredible ? How can you hear what the professors have to say?

TWO:(S) That's easy. You use interpreters. What's hard is deciding where to go - to a deaf college or a college with mostly hearing people.

BP: (to Tracy) Do you have a choice?

TRACY:(S) Sure! We all have choices, but it's deciding what to do that's tough.

KARMAN: Yeah. It's the same problem I'm having. There are lots of things I could do, but there just isn't enough time. I guess that's where the priorities come in.

ONE:(S) Because you decided that studying isn't as important to you as something else right now? Is that why you're quitting?

KARMAN: I guess that's the way it seems.

MOTHER: I'm rather surprised at that. Personally I can't imagine too many things more important than learning. I've always been so curious to learn new things and read all kinds of books.

MARGE: You know, I feel the same way. Really, it's the reason I became a tutor. I thought everybody should have the opportunity to read what they wanted when they wanted to.

KARMAN: But the way you read is fun and easy. You just read! But I've got to work at it, study these stupid books, answer embarassing questions (looks at BP). It's not fun for me. Maybe someday I'll get good at it but now it's hard!

TWO:(S) You're right. Learning new things has never been easy for me either. You probably have better things you can do with your time. You could always put it off until you're older. Maybe you'll have more free time then.

BP: Don't say that! You're suppose to be encouraging her to stick with it.

JANE: Yes! School's important. If she continues, it'll get easier. It's always hard at the beginning.

WAITRON: Excuse me. Does anybody need anything else? We're going to be closing soon.

(General agreement that nothing more is needed. People pay their checks.)

KARMAN: I'll call you this summer, Marge, if my schedule changes. Thanks for your help. (Quickly gathers her stuff up and starts to leave.)

MOTHER: Good bye, Karman. It was nice meeting you. I hope you look more at the changes you want. Try to envision who you want to be and how that is going to happen. Sometimes it helps to make things happen if we can see them in our mind. We're the only ones who can make things change for ourselves

(Karman leave.)

TRACY: (S) I think you're right. If we can imagine how we want things to be, it's the first step towards making them happen. When I imagine college and see myself at school, learning, enjoying myself, growing, I begin to think it can happen. I see that I don't need to be

afraid. I can do it and I will. It helps to have a picture in my mind of what I want to do and go for it.

MARGE: I never thought about it like that before. I can see how that might help get things changed. Maybe I'll start practicing seeing things. Who knows? Maybe the world will be different.

LITERACY VOICES:
A Trilogy of One Act Plays

Voices

*

Twogether

*

Helping Out

Written by Rita Collins
a literacy drama production

Literacy Voices:
A Trilogy of One Act Plays

Literacy Voices are three plays that represent various experiences in adult literacy. Although the plays can be taken separately, together they are a more complete portrayal of the individuals encountered in literacy work.

Voices is a play that was originally designed for women. Although the parts can be done by actors, the play represents a tendency among women to not have ownership of their language. Many women enter literacy programs feeling frightened and inferior. Even in the classroom surrounded by peers, female students speak less and usually without authority. This play attempts to address that attribute with characters seeking to make words their own. It takes effort and courage, but it is possible for each of us to find our own voice.

A production done only with actresses can provide a special opportunity for women students. I found the women were more willing to try new things or to express their ideas more freely. Our production of *Voices* gave the four actresses a chance to grow in a supportive environment and explore personal issues.

Helping Out presents the experiences of a new tutor. As teachers and students, we often are unaware or too busy to consider what it means to walk into a new class as a tutor. You are a person who is expected to have answers and provide help, yet you are without the training or authority of a teacher.

In literacy classes which are increasingly overcrowded and under staffed, tutors have an important role. In the class I teach, we could not function as well as we do without tutors. They are a very special group of individuals who give to both students and teachers. The play, *Helping Out*, pokes fun at the chaotic ABE classroom and the fortitude of the noble volunteer tutor.

Twogether was an experiment for both me, as playwright, and the students, as actors and actresses. We attempted to explore the internal and external dialogues we all have. What is her inner voice saying when the teacher sternly lectures a student? Is the student

expressing his feelings when he promises once again to get more work done or simply responding to what he thinks the teacher wants to hear? Are these two people working towards a common goal? How can a teacher know if what she wants for the student is really what the student wants for himself?

This play doesn't offer any easy answers. *Twogether* reveals a glimpse of the complex issues that form adult literacy education. Teaching literacy requires more than workbooks. Adult literacy education is the interface between different cultures.

The trilogy of *Literacy Voices* offers a variety of roles. This type of production makes rehearsing easier as practice can be divided into three parts. Students are not required to be part of a long production, but can participate in a one-act play and then have an opportunity to watch others.

VOICES

CHARACTERS:

ANA
BETTY
CLEO
DELLA

Opening Scene: Two women, Ana and Betty, are sitting back to back to each other in large chairs reading. A table is set for tea towards the front. Furnishings are appropriate for a study room. There are large piles of books next to the women. A third woman, Cleo, enters searching for something. Ana and Betty are bothered as Cleo shifts things around in her search.

ANA: Have you lost something?

CLEO: I haven't lost it, but I must have put it somewhere that I can't remember. . . .

BETTY: What is it you're looking for? Perhaps we'll come across it or could help you look. . . .

CLEO: Oh no. Don't let me bother you! Go on with your reading. It isn't anything important. I'm sure I'll find it. I don't want to interrupt you. I'll be out of here in a minute. (To herself) Where did I have it last? That would be the place to start. Maybe I left if at my parent's. . . (wanders off stage)

ANA: I hate being interrupted. It's so hard to get any reading done around here. Who was that woman anyway? Had you seen her before? This book is so boring. What are you reading?

BETTY: Just something to pass the time. She did seem rather rude coming in here turning things every which way and leaving without any kind of explanation. I don't know who she is. Now that she's gone I can get back to this book. I have another one to start as soon as I've finished this one.

(Both women begin reading again. In a few minutes, Cleo enters with Della.)

DELLA: You've done a great job so far. You've figured out lots of places where you didn't have it. That's the only way to start. You're narrowing down the possibilities. Soon the only place left will be where it is and you'll find it. Did you check your elementary school yet?

CLEO: I don't think it's there. I remember going to that school but I didn't have much to say. The place was awfully crowded. Mostly the kids just did what they were told to do. A few tried to have fun, but they were moved out to special classes. I was one of those quiet kids who made it through. I sat quietly in the back of the class and didn't learn much of anything.

DELLA: Did you go to kindergarten or preschool? I know that's reaching. I doubt if I could remember that far back, but maybe if something stands out for you. Any special memories when you were that young?

CLEO: My mother cooking dinner while we watched TV. Can't remember my father at all. Guess he was at work or gone. My mother stayed home taking care of the children and the house. She's the one I remember. She was always tired. Always cooking something or taking time out from cleaning to fix a broken toy. She was there for us, but. . .

BETTY: You still looking for whatever it is you've lost? I can't imagine that you left it in here. Besides you might have noticed that there are people trying to study. So if you're finished looking, perhaps you could take your conversation outside. It's hard to read with so much talking.

ANA: What is it you're looking for anyway?

CLEO (exiting): My voice.

(Ana and Betty move to a small table with a tea service towards the front of the stage. Sit down together and pour tea.)

BETTY: Just because a person says something doesn't mean it has to make sense. She could have meant anything by that remark. There's no need to take it any one way. I mean we did hear what she said, didn't we? She does have a voice, so how could she have lost it? I don't know why you are so upset by this. A strange woman comes through here, says she is looking for her voice, and you are ready to start a full scale investigation. What makes you think that you have a better idea than she does where her voice is? (Betty's voice rises as she gets angry.)
Besides how could she have lost her voice if she could tell us that? It doesn't make any sense. Why are you going on and on about it?

ANA: Why would she be looking for something if she hadn't lost it? I'm beginning to wonder if it was lost. Maybe it was stolen.

BETTY: Stolen?! Where are you getting these ideas? First off if it is her voice that is, well, shall we say misplaced, how could it be stolen? How could anybody else steal your voice? It belongs to you, doesn't it? You really are reaching now, Ana. And you still haven't explained why you are taking time to think about this. We have better things to do. We could be studying something important. Why are you letting yourself be caught up in this other woman's problem? You are not being sensible. Are you overly tired?

ANA: If I lost my voice, I would consider it a serious problem. I wouldn't be able to say anything. How would we communicate? I can understand this woman's feelings. I'll have time for studying later. This is a problem now. I feel she needs help. That other person was trying to help her. Maybe if I help too she will be able to find it sooner.

BETTY: <u>You</u> have lost it! What are you talking about?! If she really did lose her voice, which I still don't believe possible, than how could anyone else possibly be able to help her find it? You have a good heart to want to help her, but can you even begin to describe what a voice looks like?

ANA: Good point. I don't know what it looks like, so how will I know when I find it? Perhaps I should ask that woman if she can describe it to me.

(Cleo and Della enter from opposite sides of the stage. Meet behind the table that Ana and Betty are sitting at and greet each other warmly.)

DELLA: Any success?

CLEO: I haven't found anything yet, but I'm learning so much. It was a good idea to go back to the kindergarten. I had forgotten so much about that time. Going back gave me a chance to look at who I was at that age and what it was like to be a child. I was so pliable. I listened to everything the adults told me and they told me somethings that certainly weren't helpful.

ANA: Excuse me. I'm interested in helping you search for your voice, but I'm not sure what it is I'm lookng for. Could you possibly describe it to me?

(Della and Cleo look at each other for a few seconds and then Cleo pulls up a chair to sit at Ana and Betty's table. Della leaves the stage.)

BETTY: I'm sure this will be an interesting talk and I hate to miss it, but I do have things I should be studying, so if you two will excuse me. . . (Gets up and leaves the stage.)

CLEO: I'm glad you are willing to help although I must admit that I can't give you much of a description. You know its been a long time. I realized recently that I didn't have a voice. At first I wasn't sure what to do and then, after I met Della, I began to see that I needed to just start looking back over my life for a possible place where I might have lost it.

ANA: But how did you know you lost it? I mean, first off you do have a voice. I can hear what you are saying to me sitting here. How could I hear you if you didn't have a voice?

CLEO: I have words. You hear these words. But a person's voice is different than words. The words are public property. They are used by everyone and take on the shape or color of the latest TV ad or a political campaign. I'm not sure where the words come from, but they aren't mine. My voice is different. My voice will take these words and give them meaning from my experience, my knowledge. Perhaps its like looking at a book before you understand how to read.

You can see the words on the page, you can point them out, but you have no understanding of what they are.

ANA: So when you discovered you had lost your voice, you saw words had no meaning for you?

CLEO: Something like that. It didn't happen in one day. I just began to realize more and more that the words I used weren't connected to me. I talked but the talk was an outer shell. People gave me words and I gave them back without understanding what they meant or why I used them the way I did. For a while I just wanted to be silent. But I saw that I would never be able to find my own voice that way. I had to search and searching meant talking to others, seeking out places and experiences in my life.

ANA: I think I understand what you are saying. It makes me wonder if. . . do I have a voice? I study here and learn new words, different ways of saying things, but, well it's like you said, it's all outer stuff. And it's stuff that I haven't examined to see how it fits or if it fits who I am or want to be. . . . So how do you find your voice?

CLEO: Della suggested looking back in my life to find a time when I did have it. That's hard. I've searched back through elementary school and even into kindergarten. It doesn't seem to be anywhere. I was so obedient as a child. I just sat and listened. I took the words from the adults around me and thought I needed to use those words to get by. I never thought that their words might not be mine. I've started to feel discouraged. I'm not sure I can go any further back. The memories get so vague. I'm glad you are willing to help but I don't know what you can do.

ANA: I see your problem. I would have a hard time remembering back before I was four or so. Maybe there is another way to go about it. Even if you did find the voice you had as a small child, would it fit who you are now? You're not searching for a child's voice, because now you're a grown woman. It seems to me that your voice must be closer to this time where you are now. Do you think you will recognize it?

CLEO: Maybe you're right. Maybe I need to look in a different way. This is so hard! (Sweeps tea set off the table.) I'll never find it. I don't know where to look or even when I should be looking. And

maybe I won't recognize it if I find it. It's been so long. (Walks out.)

(Ana begins to pick up broken pieces of china, placing them on the table. Betty enters, watches Ana clean up, as she stands with her hands on her hips.)

BETTY: Looks like this must have been a good discussion. So is it clear to you now? I heard that woman screaming. She must be getting closer to finding her voice.

ANA: (Looks up for a moment at Betty.) You might be right.

(Betty returns to the reading chair and picks up a book. Ana finishes cleaning up the broken dishes. Della enters.)

DELLA: Have you seen Cleo? I wonder how her search is going.

ANA: I think its going well. I have a feeling that she's getting closer to finding her voice, although now she seems discouraged. Perhaps you should talk with her. I'm not really sure what to say that's helpful. She's trying so hard. I admire her courage.

BETTY: (Slams book down) Courage!?! What are you calling courage? This woman is going around disturbing everyone, breaking dishes, screaming. You call this courage? Ana, think about your choice of words.

ANA: OK. I will. But I do think it is courageous. She is taking the time to look for something important. She knows it is serious. She's not willing to settle for less. She wants her own voice. It's not easy, Betty. You don't understand. You should talk with her. Try to understand what it is she's trying to do.

DELLA: I'm glad you're helping Cleo with her search. She's trying to discover who she is by looking at all the places she has been. She won't find her voice in any one of those places. Her voice is within her. She needs to learn how to use it. And she is. The more she knows about herself, the more she will know about her voice. Words will belong to her.

ANA: You mean she never lost her voice? She had it all along? But then what is she looking for?

DELLA: She's looking for who she is and what she wants to be. When she begins to see these things for herself, her voice will be there, saying what she wants the world to hear. She will make the words her own. Her voice will be strong and clear.

ANA: I don't think I understand this, but I am going to give it a lot of thought. It seems important to make the words I use my own. I wonder how I start?

DELLA: You have.

Helping Out

CHARACTERS:

Marge, a tutor
Gerry, student
Lynn, student
Susan, student
Secretary
Teacher

Opening Scene: It is Marge's first day as a tutor in an adult literacy class. She's not sure what to expect and feels very nervous. She has arrived at the class early before the students or teacher are there.

The stage is dark. Marge walks in and turns on the lights of the classroom.

MARGE: Oh my. I hope this is the right place. I guess I'm just a bit early for class. I wonder where I should put my stuff? I wonder where tutors are supposed to sit? Maybe I better read the tutor handbook through again just in case I missed something the first five times. I want to be good at this. I think it's so important for people to know how to read. I want to do my small part in helping out.

(Gerry enters the room. She goes straight to her desk and starts arranging her books and papers.)

MARGE: Excuse me, young lady. Can you tell me if this is the adult literacy class?

GERRY: Yes it is.

MARGE: Oh that's wonderful. I'm in the right place. My name is Marge and I'm a new tutor here. Are you a student?

GERRY: Yes.

MARGE: That's wonderful! What are you studying? Is there anything I can help you with? Today's my first day. I'm a little nervous, but I'm glad to do anything I can to help. Is that your math book? I don't

know much about math. Are you doing any reading? I could help you with reading.

GERRY: I don't need any help right now. Thanks. (Goes back to her books. Marge walks back to the table and begins flipping though the tutor handbook again.)

MARGE: What will I do if no one needs my help? Or suppose they ask me questions that I don't know the answers to? I wonder where the teacher is. Maybe this was a mistake. Maybe I should have volunteered at the crisis hotline. I don't know anything about being a tutor. Oh my. Why did I get into this?

(Lynn enters.)

MARGE: Are you the teacher? I'm Marge, a new tutor. They told me to come to this room around 6 o'clock and you would tell me what to do. I've never tutored before, but I really enjoy helping people. I've worked with the Sunday school at my church for sixteen years so I know a little bit about teaching children. And of course, I can read.

LYNN: Nice to meet you, Marge. I'm Lynn. I'm not the teacher. I'm a student here. It's great to have you. The class is packed so we need more tutors. Can you help me with an essay I'm writing?

MARGE: Oh yes, of course. I'm good at writing. I studied English literature in school and wrote all kinds of essays. Let me find a pencil. (Starts going through her bag.)

LYNN: You don't need to write anything. I just need help with some spelling. Let me see.....OK. Here it is. How do you spell 'independent'?

MARGE: Hmmm. Independent. A good word. Well, it starts with i-n, in,. . . d. . . Maybe you should look it up in the dictionary. I think that would be better.

LYNN: Yeah, that's what the teacher always says. "Look it up for yourself." I thought maybe you wouldn't know about that yet since you just got here.

GERRY: She might be new, Lynn, but she wasn't born yesterday.

LYNN: Thanks, Gerry. I could have figured that one out for myself. So how much do you get paid for being a tutor?

MARGE: Get paid? Oh no! I do it for free. I do it because I like helping people and I have some spare time. I used to work but I'm retired now. I thought it would be nice to help these people learn how to read.

GERRY: If I had spare time I could think of better things to do than be in this classroom.

(Secretary enters. Looks around.)

SECRETARY: Any tutors here?

MARGE: Yes, I'm a tutor.

SECRETARY: I have a message from the instructor. (Gives paper to Marge and leaves)

MARGE: Oh my. The instructor is going to be late. This is awful! What should we do?!

LYNN: Don't worry. All the students have their own schedules. They'll ask you for help when they need it. It's nothing to get upset about.

(Susan enters)

SUSAN: Where's the teacher?

LYNN: She's going to be late. Here's a tutor if you need help with something.

SUSAN: I forgot my pack on the bus. Can I borrow some paper, something to write with, and, oh, I'll need to borrow a reading book? It was in my pack, too.

MARGE: Oh my!

LYNN: You would forget your head if it wasn't attached.

MARGE: But I don't know where any of these things are. Maybe you should just go home today, dear, and come back tomorrow when the teacher is here.

SUSAN: My bus pass was in my pack, too. I'm not sure how I'll get home.

MARGE: OH MY!

GERRY: You can borrow paper and a pencil from me, Susan.

SUSAN: Thanks. (Looks at Lynn expectantly.)

LYNN: OK! You can share my book, but I'm not giving you a ride home..

MARGE: You are all such nice students. How thoughtful to help each other out. Well, now that we've solved most of our problems maybe we should do some studying. Do you have any more words you need help with, Lynn?

LYNN: If you could just spell "democracy"?

GERRY: Look it up for yourself, Lynn! Excuse me, Marge. Can you explain how to multiply decimals?

MARGE: Oh my! I was never much good at math, but if I could look at your book, perhaps. . . . .(starts flipping to different pages in book and reading intensely)

(Secretary comes in again.)

SECRETARY: One of your students is on the phone. Could you talk to him? It's something about an assignment he needs since he will miss class this week. (Secretary leaves quickly)

MARGE: An assignment? But I don't know anything about assignments I suppose I could take a message. . . (Marge leaves in a flutter.)

LYNN: That lady has a lot to learn or she's going to have a heart attack before the rest of the class even gets here.

GERRY: She's OK. It's just because she's new. Give her some time.

(The three students all start doing their work. After a few minutes, Marge returns.)

MARGE: Well, I handled that emergency. I must say things are going well despite all these problems. Now where was I? Oh yes! Multiplying decimals.

GERRY: I figured it out when you were gone. Thanks anyway.

LYNN: But Marge, if you have time, could you help me? How do you spell...

MARGE: Look it up for yourself, dear.

SUSAN: That's the spirit!

MARGE: (Smiling) You know, I think I might enjoy this. I don't know why I didn't become a tutor years ago. I have a knack for dealing with people's problems and, of course, I have my background in English. . . .

(Teacher comes rushing in with arms full of papers and books,)

TEACHER: You must be the new tutor. Hello. I'm the instructor. Sorry to be late, but my car. . . Anyhow I need to pick up some papers from the office. I'll be back in a minute. Can you get students started on this? (She hands Marge a pile of papers and rushes out.)

(Marge is calmly handing out papers to the three students when a bell rings. A swarm of students come through the door. Marge is immediately surrounded by people asking her questions.)

MARGE: Oh my!

TWOGETHER

CHARACTERS:

Teacher External (TE)
Teacher Internal (TI)
Student External (SE)
Student Internal (SI)

Opening Scene: Two chairs are set facing each other. Teacher (external) and Student (external) are sitting in the chairs. Behind each of them stands their internal self facing the audience. The background scene is divided into two halves. Behind the teacher is a backdrop of an academic setting; orderly, clean, remote. Behind the student is a backdrop of a cramped apartment in a cityscape.

TI: I am the inner voice of this teacher. I'm concerned about what will happen to the students and what will happen to me. Am I doing a good job teaching? Should I push these students more? Will my contract be renewed next term? I feel that together, the students and teacher, are fighting something bigger than us both. We are trying to get free in a world that wants to keep us down. But I also see that my experiences are different from the students. Are we truly in this together or am I fooling myself?

SI: I am the inner voice of this student. I worry about my kids at home and paying the rent when I'm should be thinking about learning fractions. Is coming to this class really going to make a difference? I wonder if I will ever learn all this stuff. It seems endless. My teacher makes it sound important. Does she really understand what it's all about for me?

TI: If this student would only concentrate more on his school work. Why doesn't he see how important this is? If he learned now to read better, then everything might change. He could get a better job and do something with himself. Why can't he see that?

SI: This teacher is out to lunch. She has no idea what my life is like. She should be glad that I make it here when I do. I've got so many problems at home. I try hard to come to school and when I do show up all I get is a lot of grief about my attendance.

TE: I'm so glad you made it today. We missed you last week. I hope you weren't sick. We need to have a talk about your attendance though. I worry when you miss classes. I know you want to get your GED as soon as possible.

SE: I'm sorry I missed last week. My youngest kid was sick and then I had to go for a job interview. I'm going to work harder now that I'm back in class.

TI: He always says that and nothing ever changes. He'll be working on his GED for the next five years.

SI: How can I think about my GED when I'm broke and my baby is sick? Getting a GED isn't going to change anything. Why do I even waste my time coming here?

TE: Is there anything I can do to help? It must be hard raising kids and trying to go to school. I have a hard time making arrangements when my daughter is sick. But it's difficult to make progress towards your goals when you keep missing school.

SE: I've been reading at home. I can get studying done there once the kids are in bed. I thought I might be ready to try another test this week.

SI: Why do I say these things? I haven't got the time or energy to study at all. That's why I come here. It's a few hours when there's no screaming and I can forget the kids.

TI: Why does he want to take tests? He can't possibly pass without studying more. Does he think it will happen by magic?

TE: Why don't you work more on your writing before you try another test? I could lend you materials to take home. Would that help?

SE: Yeah. That would be great. I really want to finish my GED by summer.

SI: Yeah, finish by summer. And then what? Jobs are going to appear out of the sky? My bank account grows by magic? My kids stop having problems?

TI: If only he would get his tests finished. I think it would make a big difference in his life. Maybe he would feel better about himself. He'd have something to be proud of.

TE: Have you thought what you might like to do after you get your GED? Maybe we can look at some other ideas. A GED might not be necessary depending on what you want to do.

SE: I haven't really thought much about it. I guess I figured passing the GED tests would be a first step. Then I would take it from there.

TI: Doesn't he have any dreams? Stuff he wants to do with his life? How can he be satisfied with what he's got now?

SI: How can I possibly think about the future when I have a hard time dealing with what I've got now? There isn't anyway to change what my life is. I'm stuck, but maybe things will be different for my kids.

SE: I thought my being in school would be good for my kids. I don't want them turning out like me. Maybe if they see how hard it is to go back, they'll decide to stick it out and graduate.

TE: Do your children like school? It must be nice for them when you all do homework together.

SE: They don't do that well in school. My oldest boy has lots of problems and the teachers don't seem to have time to help him. Mostly they don't have any homework. I don't see how anyone expects them to learn stuff.

SI: Why does she ask me about my kids? It doesn't make any difference to her. She gets to leave here at the end of class and go home. Her kids probably do great in school. It's not fair.

TI: And in a few years your kids will probably show up for this class. Will we do any better than the public schools? What's happening to education?

TE: The public schools certainly have a lot of problems. It's hard to know what to do. We all want our kids to learn but so many kids go through school and never get the knowledge they need. What will happen when they start looking for jobs?

SE: The same thing that happened to me. I can't get one that pays anything. I need to make enough for bus fare and the sitter. What's left over doesn't amount to beans. Will getting my GED change that? I don't know.

SI: But I doubt it. And probably as soon as I start earning more, the landlord will raise the rent.

TI: Isn't there any way out? Is this class a complete waste of his time? I hope not.

TE: Maybe you can start thinking about some other choices. What would you like to do next? Don't limit your ideas. If you can think of something you really would enjoying doing, maybe we can figure out how you can do it. I don't want you to be wasting your time.

SE: I'll give some thought to what I might do next. Coming to class isn't a waste of time though. It's given me a chance to see what I can do. I was terrible when I went to school before. At least this time, I'm learning something.

TE: That's good to hear. What have you learned that seems important to you? I sometimes wonder if we're teaching anything that's valuable here.

SE: My reading has gotten better. And I know how to spell more words. The group on bank accounts has helped. But mostly it's how I feel. The other students and the teachers make me feel like I'm somebody who can learn.

TE: That's a start. Maybe you will discover more things you can do. Because I think you can do them. You just need to see what things are out there to be done and give it a try.

SE: I'll keep trying. I'm not giving up yet.

SI: Yeah. I'm not giving up. Stick this out and maybe things will change. Who knows? I've got to do something. I refuse to sit quietly and accept failure any longer.

TI: That's a good sign if he's willing to stick with it. Maybe the class is doing something. This man is working against all odds to make a change. He just might do it.

HALF FULL HALF EMPTY HALF EMPTY HALF FULL EMPTY HALF FULL HALF HALF FULL HALF EMPTY HALF

Written by Rita Collins
a literacy drama production

TE: Well, you better get to work. I need to meet with some other students. I'll give you that extra work later in class. Let me know if there is anything else.

SE: Thanks for your help. I get discouraged sometimes, but you always seem to think we can do it. It's a good thing you can see the bright side.

TE: Sometimes it gets dark for me, too. But I'm encouraged by your determination. Thanks for staying with it.

(TE and SE shake hands.)

Half Full

This play has a format that is quite different from others in the collection. The hopes and frustrations of many students in adult literacy are presented directly to the audience. The audience is treated as though they have responsibilities, which they do, to be part of the solution.

The type of characters in Acts I and III can be changed to portray actual students in your troupe, or composites that the students decide upon. What have been the obstacles your students faced returning to school? The split between the acts (I and III) allow the students to analyze two aspects of their situation: their reasons for returning to school and what they are getting from it. The basic format of the play can be retained with adaptations made for individual experiences. Act II could be done as it is written or rewritten to reflect the characters in the first act.

The title, *Half Full*, comes from a quote concerning how individuals perceive a glass of water. There are those of us who see it as half full, and others who see it as half empty. I would imagine that most adult educators see the glass as half full. I also believe that the adults who return to school for basic skills see the glass as half full or they would not have made the decision to come back. But adult literacy is not defined by our perceptions. It is a reality that affects millions of people in this country. It affects what they do, their health, their children, and what their children achieve. Although literacy education is a field that needs optimistic professionals, it also needs professionals who are realistic and willing to work.

The work for educators goes beyond the classroom. Community awareness, funding, and educational policies are all areas that have a profound effect on adult literacy. It is necessary for instructors to question not only how to teach well, but to question why there is a continuing demand for adult literacy education. We can try to meet the needs in our classroom at the same time we work to prevent the illiteracy rate from rising even higher.

Students should also be encouraged to work on literacy issues outside of the classroom. Are they satisfied with the adult education programs? What student services are available? They can examine the circumstances that allowed them to grow up illiterate. These issues can be discussed and action taken. Writing letters, speaking at public hearings and forums, performing plays open to the community are some methods that seek to address these problems.

Many adult students feel ashamed of their academic abilities. They perceive themselves as failures, people who as children messed up. They see their skill level as an indication of how stupid they are or how lousy they did in school. Very few look at the responsibility of the school or community to provide an appropriate education. Most blame themselves.

The decision to return to school and improve basic skills is an important transition for these individuals. They have decided that the glass is half full. Their empowerment can be strengthened by letting them question the reality of their situation. What brought them to this place? What was available for them then and now?

The plays are useful in providing a place for students and instructors to discuss these ideas. Concepts can be formulated to express conflicts and possible solutions. Students have an opportunity to validate their experiences and perceptions. They have a place to begin whether to ask questions or to generate answers. Instructors have an opportunity to go the step beyond basic skill instruction. Reading and writing can be done within a context that impacts you, your students, and the community.

Half Full

CHARACTERS:

Sherry
Gus
Ellen
Ann *
Chao
Betsy
Rob
Mae
John
Janet
Clerk
Charlotte
Employment Advisor
Job Training Advisor
School Advisor
Landlord

*(S) part is Signed.

ACT I

Opening Scene: The stage is empty except for a row of six chairs and a space (for a wheelchair) facing the audience. Lights come on. Sherry enters from stage left. Other characters will enter from alternating sides of the stage when it's their turn to speak. Each person will approach their chair slowly, turn towards the audience, speak their line, and sit down. At that point, the next person comes on stage.

SHERRY: I never learned to read much when I was in school as a kid. I wanted to be able to go into a store and buy a birthday card for a friend without asking the clerk for help.

GUS: I got injured on the job and wanted to go back to school. It took a long time, but I finally made it. My caseworker didn't see much need for me to get better educated. I guess she thought it was cheaper if I was stupid.

ELLEN: (in a wheelchair) I was excited about going to the community college class. Then I discovered that I couldn't get into the restrooms. We complained a long time about that one.

ANN: (S) I came back to school to get my GED. I use American Sign Language. It's difficult to study for this test in English. The GED tests are offered in Braille and in Spanish. It's not offered in my language.

CHAO: I like coming to this class very much. Often I'm tired because I need to work hard to pay my rent. Still I want to get an education so I can be successful in this country.

BETSY: I didn't come back to school to get a diploma. I just wanted to learn things, but I'm slow. They tell me I can't stay in this class too long because there is a waiting list. I don't know what I'll do when I leave here.

ROB: I finished high school but when I took the test for college, they told me I needed to study more. Why didn't high school prepare me for college the first time?

MAE: (Enters and faces the seven people sitting down. Her back is to the audience. She looks up and down the row.) Well, don't just sit there! Do something about it.

ACT II

SCENE ONE

Opening Scene: Ellen, John, Mae, and Sherry are grouped to one side of the stage which is set up to be a classsroom.

JOHN: I'm sorry, Ellen. The school just doesn't have the money to put in power bathroom doors. I don't think it is too much to ask that another student or teacher open the doors for you when you need to use the restroom.

MAE: John, it is too much to ask of me. I'm trying to teach a classroom full of students. I don't have time to be running to the restroom with Ellen. But that's not the point. The point is Ellen needs to be able to go there by herself.

SHERRY: I don't mind helping her but sometimes after I let her in, I forget to go back and she's been stuck in there a long time. Why can't we just take the doors off?

JOHN: It's against regulations. We have to have restroom doors. The college is supportive of you, Ellen, it's just a tight year for funds.

ELLEN: It's a tight year for my bladder!

JOHN: I'll look into this matter and see what can be done. Maybe we can put it into next year's budget. I just want you to know that I'm behind you in this.

ELLEN: You're not behind me when I need to get into the bathroom, John. The students have put together a petition that we are sending to the dean. I'm tired of waiting.

SCENE TWO

Opening Scene: As the light fades on Scene One, lights focus on the other side of the stage set up as an Information Booth. The Clerk is busy with papers. Ann is standing in line with other students. As the lights come on, she moves up next in line.

ANN:(S) Can you give me information about the GED class?

CLERK: (without looking up from papers) Next! Can I help you? Next please! Next!

ANN:(S) (Hits the counter top to get the Clerk's attention.) GED information, please. (Writes it down)

CLERK: Oh! GED information. Let's see. (Ruffles through papers) This must be your lucky day. There are two GED classes for people who can't hear. One is ten miles in that direction and the other is fifteen miles in that direction. You have a choice! (finishes pointing in two directions and smiles at Ann, looks back down at papers) Next!

(Ann looks frustrated for a moment then gets an idea. She turns the Information desk around so now she is in the position of the clerk and the Clerk finds herself standing at the head of the line.)

CLERK: Excuse me. I am interested in an accounting course. How do I sig up?

ANN:(S) You need to complete the registration form. You can mail it in or call using a TTY.

CLERK: (talking louder) I'm sorry. I don't understand that hand stuff. Don't you speak English? I want to register!

ANN: (S) If you can't make your needs known, please move on. Next!

(The next person in line moves forward and begins signing to Ann that he wants to enroll in a geography course. The Clerk watches in amazement. Then she pushes this new person aside. She grabs a pencil and starts writing her request, finishes writing and shoves it towards Ann.)

ANN:(S) Oh, an accounting course. That is held at . . .(begins giving directions.)

CLERK: (Screaming) I don't understand!

ANN:(S) Now you do.

SCENE THREE

Opening Scene: Betsy, Chao and Janet sitting at a table talking. Schools books are piled on the table with coffee cups.

CHAO: (addressing Betsy) I don't understand how you could go to school for twelve years in this country and never learn to read. What was the matter? Did you sleep through all your classes?

JANET: I dropped out in the seventh grade so I've got an excuse. But you stuck it out to the end, Betsy. How come you didn't learn this stuff back then?

BETSY: I guess the classes weren't right or the teachers didn't know how to teach. I don't know what happened. But I didn't learn to read.

JANET: Wasn't it hard to come back to school? After twelve years, you should have been sick to death of school.

BETSY: At first it was hard, but I've gotten use to it. I still get upset when I don't get something right. My reading and spelling has gotten better though. That's why I keep coming back.

CHAO: Don't you feel angry that your teachers didn't help you learn to read before?

BETSY: Nope. I'm not angry. I guess they tried their best. Maybe I was just too dumb to learn.

JANET: Dumb! Then how come you're learning now?

BETSY: Hmmm. I don't know. Maybe it's just the right time for me to learn to read. Or maybe it's something else. I'll have to give it some thought.

JANET: I don't know how you can be so calm about this, Betsy? If I were you, I would be angry. Don't you see the time you wasted being in school and not learning anything? Those people cheated you out of an education. Now you've come back and you are learning. But you're an adult! You could be doing other things.

BETSY: But I like coming to this school. I'm not sure what other things I would want to be doing.

CHAO: Coming to school is a good thing. I believe Janet is just saying you could learn other kinds of things now if you didn't have to learn the things you were supposed to have learned before.

BETSY: But what good would it do for me to get angry? Who would I yell at? My first grade teacher? The principal of the middle school? Maybe you are right and things weren't done right before so I suffer now. But mostly I feel good that I'm getting the education that I always wanted. Why cry over spilled milk?

JANET: I'm not sure who you could yell at. But it's not right, Betsy. You should have gotten a good education when you were a kid and I'm angry!

SCENE FOUR

Opening Scene: Gus, Rob, Charlotte and John are standing at a bus stop. Gus and Rob are carrying school books.

JOHN: Aren't you two in the adult education class at the community college?

GUS: Yes. Do you go to college, too?

JOHN: I was thinking about going. Last week I went on Monday and took a reading test. I guess I didn't do so well. The guy giving the test told me which class I would be in. I went by the room and looked in. It didn't seem like the place for me.

GUS: How come? Was that our class?

JOHN: Yeah. I saw you two there but. . . . I mean I see you now and you two look like regular students. But when I looked in that room and saw what was on the board and how the room was set up, I decided that place must be for stupid people. I mean some of the students in there were learning words I knew in elementary school. I mean I want to go to college. I don't want to go back to first grade.

ROB: How come you want to go to college?

JOHN: To learn more than I know now! I have a job cooking in a nursing home. I'm suppose to read recipes and make meals for people with all kinds of health problems. It's starting to get harder. Sometimes I need to change the amounts in the recipes or my supervisor sends me new recipes I need to figure out. I like working there and I want to keep my job. So I decided to go to school and brush up on reading and math.

CHARLOTTE: You have good reasons for returning to school, young man. I'm sorry you can't find the kind of class you want. You are certainly in a pickle! So what will you do? Lose your job or go to school with these characters? (Gives a sour look towards Rob and Gus.)

JOHN: I don't know what to do. Maybe I should try taking that test again.

ROB: Maybe you should try visiting our class.

JOHN: What good would that do?

GUS: The class has all different kinds of people. Sure some can read hardly at all, but some read well. Some people are there to work on math. There are a lot of nice people in the class and we all try to work together. It's the only way to get through.

CHARLOTTE: What do you mean work together? Aren't you each learning things for yourself? You mean you cheat!?!

GUS: No, no, nothing like that. See, I'm good at math, but my spelling is rotten, so I can explain math to Rob and he helps me out when I'm looking a word up in the dictionary. Nobody is perfect, but we can share the skills we do have with other people and let them help us It sure saves time.

ROB: And it saves my nerves! I used to get frustrated waiting for a tutor to help me. Now I see that there are a lot of people I can ask. Gus and I have started studying together on Saturdays at his place. It's great! I'm beginning to see that there are many things I can learn without even going to school. I can learn from people around me.

JOHN: So why go to school at all?

ROB: The college is a good place to study with other people and they've got computers.

GUS: The class also has films and speakers, plus books we can borrow. But you know? I'm beginning to think we could do this on our own. We could organize our own group and invite speakers.

CHARLOTTE: Well! I never heard anything like it. Imagine thinking you could learn anything without going to school. (Turns to John) I would be careful if I were you, young man. Don't get mixed up with these two characters. You take that test and find yourself a proper class.

SCENE FIVE

Opening Scene: Four desks are on stage. Each has a person sitting doing paperwork. There is a large sign on the front of each desk; one

says "Employment", one "Job Training", one "School", and the other "Landlord". Janet walks on stage and approaches the "Employment" desk.

EMPLOYMENT: Please have a seat, Janet. I've looked over your information. I can't offer you much right now . There just aren't a lot of jobs out there. Times change and what employers want changes. You might consider going into a job training program. You would become more skilled and also those programs would help you find a job. Good luck!

(Janet gets up and walks to the next desk, "Job Training".)

JOB TRAINING: Please have a seat, Janet. I looked over the results of your tests. Your math skills are good, but your reading isn't. Most employers want workers who can read instructions or manuals for the job. Have you ever thought of going back to school? If you could improve your reading, we would be glad to consider you for our program. The community college has adult reading classes that are free. If you study hard, it shouldn't take you too long. Then you could go through our four month job training and start earning a decent wage.

(Janet gets up and walks to the next desk, "School".)

SCHOOL: Please have a seat. I just checked your reading test. You scored 216. That means you would be in the Tuesday evening class. Unfortunately that class is full. In fact all of our classes are full right now. I would be happy to take your name for our waiting list. I'll let you know if there are any openings or you can check back here in three months when the new term starts.

(Janet gets up and walks to the next desk, "Landlord".)

JANET: In three months I can start school. Once I improve my reading, I can go into a job training program. That will take four months. Then I can look for a job. I should start earning money in about,. . . . .say eleven months. Can I hold off paying my rent until then?

LANDLORD: No.

ACT III

Opening Scene: The stage is empty except for a row of six chairs and a space (for a wheelchair) facing the audience. Lights come on. Sherry enters from stage left. Other characters will enter from alternating sides of the stage when it's their turn to speak. Each person will approach their chair slowly, turn towards the audience, speak their line, and sit down. At that point, the next person comes on stage.

SHERRY: I went back to school and studied hard. I can read most birthday cards now by myself. I even started writing letters to go inside of the cards. I've come a long way.

GUS: I've been back in school for three years. Learned what I came for and now I'm studying history and algebra. Seems like there is always something more to learn out there. Why stop now?

ELLEN: (in a wheelchair) The school finally put power doors in the restrooms. It took a long time. Now we're trying to get a larger classroom. I guess there will always be something we need to fight for.

ANN:(S) More people are learning Sign language, but we still feel isolated. Many events at the college or in the community aren't interpreted. It's hard for me to participate.

CHAO: I'm working more hours at my job although I go to school when I can. I wonder if finishing my GED will make a difference. Will it help me earn more money?

BETSY: There just aren't programs around to train people who are slow. This class helps me in some ways, but it's not going to get me a job. Who can help me find work?

ROB: The world is changing fast. I wonder if I can ever catch up. Does it mean I'm stuck at low paying jobs forever? I want a better life.

MAE: (Enters and faces the audience) These adults came back to school because they were ready to change their lives. It was scary and difficult for many of them. Some had to fight to even get into a program. But they did it! They came back to school and worked hard to learn things they hoped would make their lives better. They made

a start. Now it is up to you (points to audience). There is still a lot to do. We need your help.

ANN: If you are part of a business or organization that provides public events, have them interpreted for hearing-impaired people.

ELLEN: Make sure your business or school is accessible to everyone!

SHERRY: If you are a parent, get involved with your children's education. Are they learning what they need in school? Don't be shy about asking the school questions. Take a friend with you for support when you talk to their teachers. Make sure your child is getting the education she needs.

GUS: It doesn't matter who you are, you can learn. There are many things that keep people uneducated. Don't accept these barriers. Do what it takes to learn the things you want to learn.

ROB: Other people might put you down and make you feel dumb. Don't accept that! You have potential to grow and to acquire new knowledge.

MAE: (To the audience) We don't have all the answers and we still have a lot of our own questions. But we'd like to hear your thoughts. Any questions or ideas?

Word Dreams

This play is the story of two old women who meet on a park bench. As the story unfolds, we learn they were students together in a literacy class years before. They lost touch with each other when the one woman, Tina, quit the class. Now, years later, they meet up again. *Word Dreams* explores the different perceptions these women have of literacy and how literacy has affected their lives.

It is valuable to ask ourselves as teachers, and to encourage our students, to consider the meaning of literacy. For each individual, there can be many answers and these answers can change. An adult enters a literacy program with one idea as to what it will mean to read and how reading might change her life. A year later, as a more skilled reader, this same adult may have very different ideas. Putting these ideas into words and examining our individual perceptions of literacy is useful. For students, it often provides a recognition of growth and progress. For teachers, examining the various aspects of literacy is a reminder of what we are doing and why.

Word Dreams looks at time. How have we changed? What has remained the same? The play starts at one point and looks back. What futures do your students see when they look ahead? The time differences in this play will allow the actresses or actors to experiment with costumes. It is written with two Tina's and two Suki's; each one old and young. These parts can be played by the same person with a change in costume and make-up, or with different people as the older and younger versions. The parts could also be changed to be two men. Having a man and a woman meet after a number of years would also be an interesting way of presenting this play. What might the dialogue be if Harry and Tina met in the park forty years later?

This play is perhaps the softest in the collection. It doesn' t rally like most of the others, but offers reflection. *Word Dreams* is a chance to look at where we have been and where we are going. For our ABE Troupe, a good way to end the year.

WORD DREAMS

Written by Rita Collins
a literacy drama production

Word Dreams

CHARACTERS:

Suki
Tina
Suki, the younger
Tina, the younger
Teacher
Tutor
Robert
Harry

ACT I

Opening Scene: Suki, an older woman, is sitting on a park bench reading the newspaper. Another older woman, Tina, approaches. Tina sits down on the same bench and starts arranging her various bags. Suki, a little annoyed by the commotion, looks up from her paper.

TINA: I hope I'm not bothering you. This looked like the perfect bench since it's in the sun. My bones take a long time to warm up these days. I didn't think that rain would ever end last week . And here today the sky is so blue. It feels great to be alive. You picked yourself a wonderful bench to sit on.

SUKI: It is nice to get out. I get bored in my little apartment. Reading the paper out here is a whole different experience. I feel like I'm part of the bigger world.

TINA: I know exactly what you mean. I get the same feeling when I drink a cup of coffee at that corner cafe. I can drink a cup of coffee at home, and the coffee I make myself taste much better, but it just seems when I'm having coffee at that cafe I'm rubbing elbows with the world. It's not just a cup of coffee. It's being alive!

SUKI: Yes, well. . . (She picks up her paper and starts reading again.)

TINA: So, anything of interest in the paper? I didn't get a chance to read mine this morning.

SUKI: No, just the same old thing.

TINA: Oh. (Pause.) Do you come to this park often? I'm usually nere when the weather's nice. I don't remember seeing you before, but you do look somewhat familiar. My memory isn't all it used to be.

SUKI: I've only been here a few times. I just recently moved back to this neighborhood. I lived here a long time ago when my children were young, but then we moved. After my husband passed away and I started looking for a smaller apartment, I decided to come back here. I always like the feel of this neighborhood.

TINA: I've lived here all my life. I'm over on Oliver Street. Where did you live before?

SUKI: Why, we lived on Oliver Street for about six years. At 5230. What is your family's name?

TINA: 5230! Are you Suki Burns? I'm Tina!. I live at 5227. Do you remember me?

SUKI: Tina?! I don't believe it. I thought you must have moved away years ago. I didn't even think to stop by your house. How are you? You look wonderful. How long has it been? Let's see, my youngest had just started school she must have been six and now, well, she just turned forty. I guess we don't need to figure that out but it's been a long time. How are you doing?

TINA: I'm fine. Still in the old house. My mother died about eleven years ago and left it to me. It's nice to see you, Suki. I've thought about you so often and wondered what happened to you. I'll always remember that first day we met.

SUKI: We were both so nervous starting that adult literacy class. You wore that funny hat! My hands were shaking so bad I couldn't write my name and the teacher thought I was a complete fool.

ACT II

Opening Scene: An adult literacy classroom. The room is in a state of confusion. People are entering and asking questions. The teacher and tutors are trying to get students registered. Tina (the younger) enters wearing a funny hat.

TINA: Excuse me. Is this the right place? I'm interested in improving my spelling for an office job.

TEACHER: Yes, you're in the right place. Just take a seat and I'll be with you in a moment. Can you complete this registration form? One of the tutors can help you if you want.

TINA: Sure. (Sits down talking to herself.) If I knew how to do a registration form, I wouldn't be coming to this class.

(Suki enters and looks very nervous.)

TEACHER: Can I help you?

SUKI: I'm looking for the adult reading class.

TEACHER: You're in it. Please have a seat

(Suki sits down next to Tina. More students enter. Robert and Harry sit at the same table as Tina and Suki.)

ROBERT: What are you two ladies here to study?

TINA: I want to improve my spelling. I hope to get an office job so my spelling needs to be very good. What about you?

ROBERT: To learn to read. Never got it as a kid. Thought now might be the time. Can't read a thing. Get tired of asking questions. Want to find things out for myself.

TINA: You can't read anything? Why I never. . . I can read . . .some, but I know there is always room for improvement.

HARRY: I can read OK, but I wouldn't mind learning how to write better. My brother just moved to St. Louis. I certainly would like to write him letters once in a while and let him know how the family here is doing.

ROBERT: (To Suki) What brings you here?

SUKI: (Still very nervous) I want to read better. There are so many books out there. Sometimes I go into the public library and just stare. I wonder what's inside all them books. My youngest child just started school this month. I thought it's time I start to read more, before my baby gets smarter than me.

TUTOR: Does anyone want help filling out registration forms?

TINA: No thank you. We all can manage quite well.

(Tutor walks away.)

TINA: Do any of you know how to fill this thing out?

HARRY: Let me see. . . Just need to put down your name, address and last grade completed.

TINA: Would you be so kind to write mine? I forgot my glasses today.

TEACHER: How are you doing? My name is Carol. I'm the teacher for the class. I'd like to talk with each of you to find out what brought you here and what you would like to study.

TINA: I'm Tina Hayes. I want to brush up my spelling for an office job. And, of course, there is always room to improve one's reading.

HARRY: I'm Harry. I'm here to learn how to write letters. I finished high school but somehow I never was any good at writing.

TEACHER: (Turns to Suki) You haven't finished filling out your form yet. Do you want to learn how to write?

SUKI: I know how to write some. I just feel so nervous being here. I never went to college before. I'd like to learn how to read better.

TEACHER: It sounds as though you are all in the right class. We will be giving you a test later this morning to find out what books to start you in. You can relax now and get some coffee while we get the other students registered. (Teacher leaves to talk with other students.)

TINA: A test? Why do we have to take tests? We're adults. We just told her what we want to learn. That should be enough. She should just give us books and let us get started.

ROBERT: Maybe she'd give us the wrong books if she doesn't know how we read. Don't worry about a stupid test. At least you don't have to pay anything to take it.

HARRY: How can you take a test without your glasses anyway? You should tell her. Maybe you can take it tomorrow.

TINA: My glasses? Oh yes, my glasses. I forgot them. I'll ask her to give me a book to so I can start studying today. I can take the test later.

SUKI: Taking a test can't make me feel any more nervous than I feel already.

ACT III

Opening Scene: The same classroom a few months later. The students are sitting at desks studying. Everyone appears more relaxed.

TUTOR: Tina, I noticed you skipped the last page of your reading assignment. Do you want me to go over with you?

TINA: No thanks. I can do it myself. I'll work on it at home tonight.

ROBERT: Why do you always do that, Tina? Are you here to learn or to show off your hats?

TINA: I'm here to learn. But I don't need her help. I'm not stupid. I can do this paper by myself just fine.

ROBERT: You're not stupid, but you are stubborn. And you've got the best lines I ever heard for not doing your work.

TINA: What do you mean by that? I get my work done. I just like doing it at home where it's quiet.

ROBERT: Where it's quiet and your mother can help.

(Tina stands up and slams her book down.)

SUKI: Don't pay any attention to him, Tina. Let's get some coffee.

(They walk over to the coffee pot.)

SUKI: You shouldn't let him bother you. You work hard. Your writing has gotten much better and you passed the spelling test with a hundred. Don't worry about Robert. He's just jealous you're going out with Harry.

TINA: Robert drives me crazy. I can't stand this class. If it's not the teacher bugging me, it's one of the students. I should just quit and get myself a job.

SUKI: What ever happened to that office job you talked about? Maybe you could start that now that your spelling is better.

TINA: It takes more than spelling to get an office job. I'm not cut out for school, Suki. I'm not stupid. I know that. But I don't want people seeing what I don't know.

SUKI: You're proud, Tina. It's one of the things I like best about you. But you shouldn't let it stop you from getting what you need. Don't listen to Robert. We can sit somewhere else in the class. I think you should try to stay in school until your reading gets better. Then you can get the job you want.

HARRY: Can I join in this conversation? Don't let Robert upset you, Tina. He was just teasing. We all know you're the smartest one here. You are the only one who gets the reading papers done right, even if you do take them home to finish.

TINA: Thanks, Harry. School just isn't the place for me now. Maybe I should take some time off. I could start up again next term.

ACT IV

Opening Scene: The same as Act I. Tina and Suki are sitting together in the park.

SUKI: I never saw you after that day you left the class. I thought maybe I would stop by your house, but I didn't want you to feel bad about not coming back to school. Then the next summer, we moved across town.

TINA: Did you ever get to read all the books in the public library?

SUKI: Goodness no! But I've read a lot of them. And I'm still reading. Now I go to my granddaughter's school once a week and read with the children. What about you? Did you ever go back to school?

TINA: I went back a few times, but I never learned enough to read well. Still can't read the newspaper. I don't mind it though. I don't have time to just sit around and read anyway. I'm busy with my church and the bowling team. I wonder what happened to the other folks in that class?

SUKI: Harry caught on to writing pretty quick. He finished in spring term and I haven't seen him since. Robert was working on his reading when I left the school. He was so hardheaded, he's probably still there. I wonder if the adult school is still over on Broadway? Maybe we should stop by to visit sometime, see if Robert is there.

TINA: Why would you want to visit that old place? Nothing but a bunch of dummies who can't read.

SUKI: Tina, why didn't you ever see how special that place was? It wasn't full of dummies. It was full of people who decided to take control of their lives. Full of people who wanted to change things, those not willing to accept things the way they were.

TINA: Are you sure we were at the same place? No, I'm just teasing you, Suki. That school meant different things to you and me. I didn't like it. It just reminded me of what I didn't have.

SUKI: Maybe you already had enough and didn't need more. I was empty inside. I felt hungry to learn more things, especially when my baby started to school.

TINA: There were empty parts in me, too. But school learning didn't fill them. It just made me feel worse. You know after I left I started working at my church's thrift shop. I was always good at numbers. Selling things, talking to people, arranging the merchandise was perfect for me. I ended up working there for about ten years. I guess reading is one of those things I just don't need.

SUKI: Maybe not. Being able to read has meant a lot to me. I don't think it changed my life any, but it filled those times when I needed a quiet moment. It's like having a friend you can call on anytime

TINA: (Laughing.) We do see things different, Suki. I would never describe reading as a friend. I think of it more as an enemy I do battle with. But I guess we got along so well back then because we were different. I'm glad you're back in the neighborhood. Let's go for a cup of coffee.

(Both ladies get up and exit. Final curtain.)

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